

## NEWS OF NOTE



# Hearings focus on UC's management of DOE labs

The University of California and the three DOE national labs it manages received strong support from a collective of California and New Mexico state legislators Tuesday, during a special hearing in Sacramento. On Wednesday, a second hearing took place in Washington, D.C. before the House Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations regarding UC's management of LANL and that lab's business practices.

The Tuesday hearing, chaired by state Sen. Denise Duchenev (D-Chula Vista), featured testimony by UC President Richard Atkinson, UC Vice President for Laboratory Management Bruce Darling, UC San Diego Chancellor Robert Dynes, the directors of the three labs — Michael Anastasio, Charles Shank (LBNL) and Pete Nanos (acting, LANL) — and representatives of Los Alamos and Livermore employee groups.

While the hearing focused on the recent issues regarding business and administrative practices at Los Alamos, some representatives of employee groups again raised the issues of seeking enhanced protection for whistle blowers and ensuring that all Lab employees are provided the full protection benefits of the UC personnel system. Another employee representative presented a letter to DOE Secretary Spencer Abraham signed by more than 2,000 Livermore Lab employees, who strongly support continuing UC management of the Laboratory.

A portion of the day was also spent exploring the critical scientific and technological work conducted at the three labs and the opportunities for pioneering research afforded by the UC contract to manage the labs.

Maria Pavallacini, a professor at UC Merced, the UC system's newest campus, cited the labs' — particularly Livermore's — dissemination of technology to UC systems as "a hallmark of UC-laboratory relationships." Pavallacini said her own research in genetics would have been stymied were it not for the resources she used at Livermore. She also said the Lab has been valuable to UC Merced's ability to recruit faculty and staff.

"The potential for collaboration with world-class scientists and the chance to use sophisticated instrumentation has been a powerful recruitment tool."

The collective of California and New Mexico state legislators agreed with the testimony, citing overarching support for the continuation of the UC contract, despite some members of Congress who have suggested competing the lab management contract in the wake

of recent problems at Los Alamos.

"I was a little flabbergasted that this situation has come to this point," said state Sen. Don Perata (D-Oakland/Livermore). "This lab is internationally known, and the work that is done there is unprecedented... We should not be fooling around with something this important at this point in our history."

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University is committed to taking all necessary steps to restore the confidence of the state legislatures, Congress, the Department of Energy and the public in UC's management of LANL, which he described as a "vital national resource." He summarized the various management changes UC has made at LANL.

Atkinson called the scientific and technical work done at the three labs "particularly important now given current world events," and he commended the integrity and dedication of the laboratories' employees.

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Each laboratory director then pointed to contributions their staffs are making to homeland security, and stressed the importance of the relationship between the laboratories and University. Anastasio gave brief descriptions of HANAA, the Lab's hand-held detector of biological pathogens, and Cryo3, a joint project between LLNL and LBNL to detect radioactive materials that could be smuggled across a border or through

a port.

Anastasio also acknowledged the necessity for sound business practices at all UC labs. "We believe we are being held accountable by UC, DOE, the Legislature, Congress and the public. We have a special mission and we have a special environment in which we are allowed to do that mission. It enables our creativity and our excellence. But there is a special requirement that we be held to very high standards. We understand that."

California and New Mexico legislators asked a range of questions, particularly methods for employees to bring forward any concerns. All three lab directors outlined a number of systems and hotlines that have been set up to report improprieties and told of their personal efforts to provide open communication.

With regard to LANL, Darling, speaking via satellite from Washington, D.C., re-emphasized UC's determination "to raise the business practices of the laboratory to the same quality as the science and technology programs." It was a message he carried over to the Wednesday hearing before the House Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee.

Others who testified at the Wednesday hearing included current and former LANL officials, who defended their actions in the dismissals of investigators Glenn Walp and Steve Doran, disputed the perception of widespread illegal activity at LANL and denied any attempt on their part to withhold information.

In response to committee members' questions, Darling pledged to pursue any new information about employee concerns at the laboratories and expressed support for acting Director Pete Nanos' efforts to bring about a more open environment at LANL.

"I want to emphasize that the University has not and will not let its unwavering focus on the important business and management issues that we are discussing today distract the laboratory from fulfilling its mission to the nation. The work being done at Los Alamos today is as important as at any time in the 60 years that the University has had the privilege and responsibility of managing the laboratory. We remain honored to oversee this important work on behalf of the nation."

For the complete testimony of Atkinson and Darling at Tuesday's Sacramento hearing, see <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/losalamos/>. For the complete testimony of Darling at the Wednesday House hearing, see <http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/losalamos/0303hearing.html>.